



H-Gram 043: The Ship That Wouldn't Die (1)—The Ordeal of USS Franklin (CV-13), 19 March 1945

20 March 2020

Contents

- 75th Anniversary of World War II: USS Franklin (CV-13)
- 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War: "Sojourn Through Hell"—Vietnamization and U.S. Navy Prisoners of War, 1969-70
- The Spanish Influenza Epidemic of 1918-19

Overview

This H-gram tells the story of the carrier Franklin (CV-13), which suffered the greatest damage and highest casualties of any U.S. ship that did not sink, as well as an update tracking with the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War, and a reprise of my 2018 H-gram article on the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918-19.

75th Anniversary of World War II

USS Franklin (CV-13)

On the morning of 19 March 1945, the aircraft carrier Franklin (CV-13), operating 50 nautical miles off the Japanese coast, was in the process of



Franklin (CV-13) afire and listing after a Japanese air attack, off the coast of Japan, 19 March 1945. Note fire hoses and crewmen on her forward flight deck, and water streaming from her hangar deck. Photographed from Santa Fe (CL-60) (80-G-273882).

launching a major strike against Japanese naval vessels in port Kure, Japan, when a Japanese dive-bomber dropped out of the overcast and scored two direct hits with bombs. The result was devastating as the fully fueled and armed Navy and Marine aircraft on the flight deck and hanger deck contributed to over 120 secondary explosions that turned Franklin into a raging inferno virtually from stem to stern. In probably the most heroic damage control effort in the history of the United States Navy (there are other contenders but not on this scale), Franklin's crew saved her despite catastrophic damage. It was the worst fire that any U.S. warship ever survived. Over 800 of

Franklin's crew were killed and over 400 wounded. No ship in the history of the U.S. Navy had suffered more casualties and survived. In fact, when combined with three previous hits by bombs and a kamikaze, Franklin suffered more dead than any other U.S. ship except Arizona (BB-39) at Pearl Harbor. Nevertheless, by the next day, Franklin was once again under her own power and returned to the United States for repair.

For their valor in saving their ship, the crew of Franklin and personnel of Air Group FIVE were awarded two Medals of Honor, 19 Navy Crosses, 22 Silver Stars, 116 Bronze Stars, and 235 Letters of Commendation, along with 808 posthumous Purple Hearts and an additional 347 Purple Hearts to survivors. One of the Medals of Honor was awarded to Franklin's Catholic chaplain, Lieutenant Commander Joseph O'Callahan, for not only ministering to the dying, but for organizing and leading damage control parties in fighting fires, jettisoning live ordnance, and preventing a magazine explosion. O'Callahan was the first Catholic chaplain in any service to receive a Medal of Honor, and the first chaplain in the U.S. Navy to be so distinguished (during the Vietnam conflict, Lieutenant Vincent Capodanno was the second in the Navy). The other Medal of Honor was awarded to Lieutenant (j.g.) Donald Gary, a 30-year prior-enlisted Sailor in the engineering department, for finding an escape route and then organizing and leading over 300 men trapped below to comparative safety. Navy Crosses were awarded to the commanding officer, Captain Leslie Gehres (the first prior-enlisted "mustang" to rise to command of a carrier), along with the executive officer and the navigator among others. The skippers of the light cruiser Santa Fe (CL-60) and destroyer Miller (DD-535) were also awarded the Navy Cross for daringly bringing their ships right alongside Franklin to render assistance.

For more on the ordeal and saving of Franklin, please see attachment H-042-1.



A U.S. Navy petty officer from the U.S. Naval Advisory Group—wearing South Vietnamese naval insignia—watches closely as a South Vietnamese student assembles an M-16 rifle at the small boat school at Saigon, December 1969 (USN 1142801).

50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War

"Sojourn Through Hell"—Vietnamization and U.S. Navy Prisoners of War, 1969-70

The U.S. and South Vietnamese incursion into Cambodia in April 1970 destroyed and captured massive quantities of stockpiled North Vietnamese arms and ammunition. It also provoked intense domestic political backlash in the United States. This included massive anti-war rallies (over 100,000 in Washington, DC, and San Francisco), and student protests on campuses across the country, notably the one at Kent State in which Ohio National Guardsmen fired on student protesters, killing two of them and two more students who weren't involved. Over the next months, about 30 ROTC buildings on campuses would be burned or bombed in protest. For much of the U.S. population, the Nixon administration's

stated policy of "Vietnamization" of the war couldn't happen fast enough. Meanwhile, several hundred U.S. prisoners of war, mostly downed aviators, languished in North Vietnamese prisons, subject to brutal interrogations and torture. Of 178 U.S. Navy personnel captured during the entire course of the war, 36 died.

The severe treatment of U.S. prisoners of war became somewhat less so in the fall of 1969, due in significant part to the actions of the senior U.S. Navy POW, Captain James B. Stockdale, and the most junior Navy POW, Seaman Apprentice Douglas B. Hegdahl. Believing Hegdahl to be illiterate and "incredibly stupid," the North Vietnamese released him as a propaganda ploy in August 1969, completely unaware that Hegdahl had memorized the names and key information of 256 American POWs. Hegdahl was ordered by senior POWs to accept early release (despite his initial refusal) in order to get this vital data back to U.S. authorities, as well as to provide detailed confirmation of the North Vietnamese use of torture, which the United States subsequently used against North Vietnam at the Paris Peace Talks.

Meanwhile, the North Vietnamese tried yet again to break the will of Captain Stockdale, who they viewed as the key leader of U.S. POW resistance to being used in North Vietnamese propaganda efforts. In September 1969, rather than risk submission in yet another round of extremely painful torture, Stockdale inflicted near-mortal wounds on himself that were intended to convince the North Vietnamese of his willingness to die before he would submit, an action for which he would be awarded the Medal of Honor after the POWs' release in 1973. Between Stockdale's determined resistance and Hegdahl's embarrassing revelations, the North Vietnamese began to reach the conclusion that torture was counter-productive. Although psychological torment of the POWs, as well as occasional beatings, continued with no end in sight,

deliberate torture largely ceased for the duration of the war,

For more on the Vietnamization of the war in 1969-70, the incursion into Cambodia in 1970, and the treatment of U.S. POWs, please see attachment H-043-2.



An influenza precaution sign mounted on a wood storage crib at the Naval Aircraft Factory, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on 19 October 1918. As the sign indicates, the Spanish influenza was then extremely active in Philadelphia, with many victims in the Philadelphia Navy Yard and the Naval Aircraft Factory. Note the sign's emphasis on the epidemic's damage to the war effort (NH 41731-A).

The Spanish Influenza Epidemic of 1918-19

I am also enclosing a link to the piece on the Spanish influenza of 1918-19 that I wrote in October 2018. Information on the current virus (COVID-19) should be derived from current reputable sources, and because a virus acted one way in 1918-19, it does not mean a different virus will behave in similar fashion now. The latest Navy information on the Coronavirus Disease 19 (COVID-19) may be found here [<https://navylive.dodlive.mil/2020/03/15/u-s-navy-covid-19-updates/>]. My original 2018 article, a segment of H-Gram 022, may be found here [<https://www.history.navy.mil/about-us/leadership/director/directors-corner/h-grams/h-gram-022/h-022-1.html>].

Nevertheless, I believe there are still a number of salient lessons from the Spanish influenza epidemic. One that I have not heard mentioned in recent days is the importance of staying in touch with those who are in home quarantine. During the 1918-19 epidemic, many people died in their homes because they could not get care in time. In many cases, these might have survived the flu with proper care, but died instead from dehydration (or even starvation), hypothermia (untended furnaces went out), or asphyxia (untended furnaces gassed them). As the epidemic peaked in the fall of 1918, it became very much an "every man for himself" environment as fear of contracting the virus overrode many people's sense of compassion or duty. Neighbors did not help neighbors and calls for volunteers to assist the overwhelmed medical staffs went unanswered. Today, we have the advantage of widespread telephone and electronic communications to remain in touch with those otherwise isolated.

Another lesson was that viruses mutate. They can become more or less virulent over time, and they can affect different populations in very different ways. For example, during the 1918-19 epidemic, U.S. Army troops on Navy transports suffered high mortality (12,000 died in transit) whereas Navy crews on those same ships did not; to this day, no one really knows why. The first wave of the epidemic in the spring of 1918 was relatively mild, slightly worse than the normal flu except that it affected young and healthy people the most. It was the second wave of the epidemic in the fall of 1918 that was the real global killer. About 40 percent of all U.S. Sailors were infected; 121,225 Navy personnel were admitted to hospitals and 5,027 died, a mortality rate of about 4 percent (compared to 431 who died in battle during World War I). It is estimated that over 700,000 Americans died during the epidemic.

Other lessons were that the key to avoiding panic or unnecessary deaths was the timely and accurate dissemination of information, and prompt and drastic action to slow the spread of the virus.

Wartime censorship resulted in additional deaths, as people were kept in the dark to avoid giving the enemy information about how bad it was. The desire to continue with "business as usual" also led to unnecessary deaths: A war bonds parade held in Philadelphia despite clear warning the virus had arrived in the city was one of the most notorious examples of a deliberate decision by community leaders that led to widespread additional and unnecessary deaths.

Back issues of H-grams may be accessed here [<https://www.history.navy.mil/about-us/leadership/director/directors-corner/h-grams.html>].



Franklin (CV-13) afire and listing after she was hit by a Japanese air attack while operating off the coast of Japan, 19 March 1945. Photographed from USS Santa Fe (CL-60), which was alongside assisting with firefighting and rescue work (80-G-273880).

H-043-1: The Ship That Wouldn't Die (1)—USS Franklin (CV-13), 19 March 1945

*H-Gram 043, [Attachment 1](#)
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
March 2020*

Task Force 58 (TF 58), under the command of Vice Admiral Marc “Pete” Mitscher, made its third attack on the Japanese home islands on 18 March 1945. This time, the Japanese weren’t caught by surprise.

TF 58 departed Ulithi on 14 March 1945, and commenced a high-speed run toward Japan on 16 March, arriving at a launch position 90 nautical miles southwest of Kyushu at sunrise on 18 March. The extensive attempts at deception that had preceded the 16–17 February strikes in the Tokyo area (see H-Gram 042) and again on 25 February were apparently less effective. The morning strikes had to content themselves with bombing hangars and barracks because there were few Japanese planes on the ground. Most of them were airborne already looking for the U.S. carriers. The morning searches did locate several major Japanese warships, including super-battleship *Yamato*, in the vicinity of Kobe and Kure on the Inland Sea.

Over 50 Japanese aircraft were lost while trying to find and attack the U.S. carriers on 18 March. Task Group 58.4, under the command of Rear Admiral Arthur Radford (future Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) bore the brunt of the attacks while operating 75 nautical miles south of the Home Island of Shikoku. At 0725, a Japanese plane hit carrier *Enterprise* (CV-6) with a dud bomb. A G4M Betty twin-engine bomber was hit by anti-aircraft fire while attempting a *kamikaze* strike on carrier *Intrepid* (CV-11), narrowly missing, although burning fragments started a fire on the hangar deck that killed two and wounded 43 men. Just after 1300, three D4Y Judy dive-bombers attacked carrier *Yorktown* (CV-10). One of the Judys hit *Yorktown's* signal bridge with a bomb that passed through one deck and blew two large holes in the ship's side, killing five and wounding 26 men. During the night, there were numerous alerts as Japanese planes snooped the force. On carrier *Franklin* (in TG 58.2), her crew was called to battle stations 12 times over a six-hour period.

On the morning of 19 March 1945, waves of TF 58 aircraft (about 240) attacked Japanese ships in and near Kure, damaging over 16 warships, including the battleships *Yamato*, *Haruna*, and *Hyuga* (which all lacked fuel), carriers *Amagi* and *Katsuragi* (which lacked aircraft), carrier *Ikoma* (under construction), the old carrier *Hosho* (Japan's first carrier), light carrier *Ryuhō*, escort carrier *Kaiyō*, heavy cruiser *Tōnē*, light cruiser *Oyodo*, destroyer escort *Kaki*, and submarines *I-400* and *RO-67*. However, none of them were sunk. Submarine *I-205*, under construction, was damaged in a dry dock.

Shortly after sunrise on 19 March 1945, TG 58.2, under the command of Rear Admiral Ralph E. Davison, was attacked by Japanese aircraft. A Japanese plane attacked by surprise out of the overcast and made a direct hit on carrier *Wasp* (CV-18). Two thirds of *Wasp's* aircraft were away attacking Japanese ships in ports and the carrier had just secured from general quarters. The bomb passed through the flight deck, hangar

deck, and crews' quarters on the second deck before exploding in the galley as cooks and mess attendants were about to serve breakfast, causing horrific casualties. Six water mains were ruptured, and aviation gasoline flowed into lower decks, contributing to fires on five decks at the same time. Nevertheless, damage control teams had the fires out in 15 minutes. *Wasp* was recovering aircraft by 0800 and continued operations for several days despite the loss of 101 crewmen killed and 269 wounded.

At 0657, the carrier *Franklin*, flagship of Rear Admiral Ralph E. Davison (TG 58.2), began launching Corsair fighter-bombers for a strike on Kure, while Helldivers armed with new Tiny Tim anti-ship rockets warmed up. At 0705, carrier *Hancock* (CV-19) radioed a warning that a hostile aircraft was inbound. At 0706, *Franklin's* radar detected Japanese aircraft circling at about 12 miles, but the planes couldn't be seen in the overcast, nor could they be tracked due to the clutter of other TF 58 carriers launching planes. Like *Wasp*, *Franklin* had just secured from general quarters after a night of false alarms, even though she was only about 50 nautical miles off the Japanese coast. Much of her crew was lined up in breakfast chow lines.

At 0708, a Japanese dive-bomber surprised *Franklin*. Although *Franklin's* forward 5-inch and 40-mm guns opened fire almost immediately as the plane dropped out of the overcast close aboard, the Japanese dive-bomber scored two direct hits with 550-pound semi-armor piercing bombs, right as "Big Ben" was still launching her second round of strikes of the day. On *Franklin's* flight deck were 31 fully fueled and armed aircraft, propellers turning for launch. In her hanger bay were 16 fueled aircraft and five armed aircraft. The result was catastrophic. The plane, probably a D4Y Judy, was shot down by a *Franklin* Corsair after dropping the bombs (not all accounts agree on this).

This was the fourth time *Franklin* had been hit during the war, and she had already survived what was considered to that point to be the most serious fire aboard a carrier that did not result in the loss of the ship. This hit would be far worse.



Franklin (CV-13) is floated out of her building dock immediately after christening, at the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company shipyard, Newport News, Virginia, 14 October 1943. Note WAVES officers in the foreground. The WAVES' Director, Lieutenant Commander Mildred H. McAfee, USNR, was Franklin's sponsor (80-G-K-14015).

Franklin, a new Essex-class carrier, had been commissioned on 31 January 1944 (sponsored by Lieutenant Commander Mildred A. McAfee, Director of the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service [WAVES]) and had flown her first combat strikes on 30 June 1944 against the Japanese Bonin Islands. The first hit on *Franklin* came on the late afternoon of 13 October 1944, while participating in Task Force 38 strikes against Formosa prior to the Leyte landings. *Franklin* was attacked by four G4M Betty twin-engine torpedo bombers; all were hit by anti-aircraft fire and downed, although two got off torpedoes

that *Franklin* dodged. One crippled Betty attempted to hit *Franklin*, but the flaming bomber slid across the flight deck, causing little more damage than gouged wood, but killed one Sailor and wounded ten. On the next day, 14 October, *Franklin* was attacked by four Nakajima Ki-43 Oscar fighters armed with bombs, two of which missed well short while one was a near miss. The fourth bomb hit the port corner of the deck-edge elevator, which caused minor damage, but killed two *Franklin* Sailors and one air group pilot.

On 30 October 1944, while tied down operating east of Luzon providing support to the bogged-down Leyte campaign, *Franklin* had just launched 12 Hellcat fighters at 1405, when she was attacked by a mix of six D4Y Judy dive-bombers and A6M Zeke fighters armed with bombs. The first Judy's bomb just missed *Franklin*, but one the Zekes put a bomb through the flight deck inboard of the Number 5 and Number 7 5-inch gun mounts, resulting in a large explosion. A third plane near-missed with a bomb and then barely missed *Franklin* in a suicide attempt. It then crashed into the light carrier *Belleau Wood* (CVL-24), seriously damaging her. Two more kamikaze missed *Franklin*, while another that was heading for *Enterprise* (CV-6) was shot down by *Franklin* gunners. After about 20 minutes of fighting the fire, more severe fires broke out and the ship was in potential serious danger. Nevertheless, by 1530, the fires had been put out by superb damage control efforts at a cost of 56 men killed and 60 wounded. The damage was severe enough that *Franklin* had to return to the West Coast for repairs. At the time, this was considered the worst fire that a ship had survived.

Franklin returned to the Western Pacific in time for the March strikes on Japan, with a new air group (CAG FIVE) that included a mix of Hellcat fighters, Navy and Marine Corsair fighter-bombers, and Helldiver dive-bombers and Avenger torpedo bombers. The Marine squadron embarked was VMF-214 (the "Black Sheep" formerly led by Major

Gregory "Pappy" Boyington). Eleven of the 12 VMF-214 aviators gathered in their ready-room were killed when the bombs hit on 19 March.

During the 19 March attack, the first bomb penetrated the flight deck on the centerline and detonated in the forward hangar deck, blowing the forward elevator upward, starting raging fires, and knocking out the combat information center (CIC). The second bomb was even worse, hitting the flight deck amongst the densely packed aircraft ready for launch, detonating above the hangar deck, and knocking out the after elevator. The after aviation fuel system was still in operation, filled with fuel instead of inert gas, and the resulting vapor explosion blew through the hangar deck, killing all but two crewmen in the hangar. In seconds, almost the entire flight deck and hangar decks were engulfed in flames, followed quickly by numerous secondary explosion as bombs and 12 "Tiny Tim" rockets cooked off among the burning aircraft. The solid-fueled air-to-surface anti-ship rockets (with 148-pound warheads) shot in various directions, including a number straight up the flight deck. Ready ammunition in lockers, gun mounts, and turrets aft all began igniting. All told, there were 126 secondary explosions of various kinds. Witnesses on other ships were aghast at the horrifying pyrotechnic inferno overtaking *Franklin*.

Franklin's skipper, Captain Leslie H. Gehres, was thrown to the deck by the first bomb's explosion. Upon seeing the fires on the forward starboard side he ordered right full rudder to put the wind on the port side in order to keep flames away from the planes on the after flight deck. This actually had the opposite effect. The navigator, Commander Steve Jurika (who had been the intelligence officer on *Hornet* [CV-8] for the Doolittle Raid and the Battle of Midway), recommended a turn in the opposite direction, which Gehres did when he could see that the after flight deck was already engulfed in flames. Gehres also ordered the carrier's magazines to be flooded, but this could not be done because the

appropriate fire mains had been ruptured. So, the risk of a catastrophic magazine explosion remained as the surviving crewmen fought to save the ship (after the fires were out it was discovered that the primary magazine was not flooded, and had the fires penetrated further down the magazine probably would have blown).

The destroyer *Miller* (DD-535), commanded by Lieutenant Commander (later Rear Admiral) Dwight L. Johnson, came alongside to bring aboard Rear Admiral Davison and his staff (and Rear Admiral Gerald F. Bogan, on board as an observer) via breeches buoy for transfer to the carrier *Hancock* (CV-19). Johnson would be awarded a Navy Cross. Davison advised Gehres to give the order to "prepare to abandon ship," but Gehres replied that he still intended to try to save *Franklin* (some accounts indicate he didn't say anything, but did not issue such an order). Vice Admiral Mitscher, on board *Bunker Hill*, signaled permission for Gehres to abandon ship. As this was going on, light cruiser *Santa Fe* (CL-60) and destroyers were picking up hundreds of *Franklin* sailors who had been blown off or forced to jump off the ship by the explosions and flames.

Just after 0930, *Santa Fe*, commanded by Captain Harold C. "Hal" Fitz, came right alongside, literally skin to skin—a daring feat given what had happened to *Birmingham* (CL-62), which had lost 244 crewmen when *Princeton* (CVL-23) exploded alongside during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. Fitz would later be awarded a Navy Cross. Using engines to hold alongside, *Santa Fe* fought fires on *Franklin* while bringing aboard 103 wounded men, as well as others deemed non-essential (or non-expendable depending on point of view), mostly personnel of Air Group FIVE, via ladders and boards connecting the two ships. *Santa Fe* took on 826 men in 30 minutes and remained alongside for three hours. Destroyers *Hickox* (DD-673) and *Miller* assisted in fighting fires on *Franklin* despite the extreme danger of being close aboard and continued to pick up survivors from the water. There were about 106 officers and

604 enlisted remaining aboard *Franklin* to fight the fires.



Lieutenant Commander Joseph O'Callahan gives last rites to an injured crewman aboard Franklin (CV-13), after the ship was set afire by a Japanese air attack, 19 March 1945. The crewman is reportedly Robert C. Blanchard, who actually survived his injuries (80-G-49132).

The fight to save *Franklin* was probably the most epic feat of damage control in the history of the U.S. Navy, and the valor of the crew in saving their ship was truly extraordinary. Members of *Franklin's* ship's company and air group would ultimately be awarded two Medals of Honor, 19 Navy Crosses, 22 Silver Stars, 116 Bronze Stars, and 235 Letters of Commendation. Additional Navy Crosses and Silver Stars were awarded to some of the officers and crews of the *Santa Fe* and *Miller*. One Silver Star was even awarded to a civilian Corsair technician (yes, there were "tech reps" back then, too).

One Medal of Honor was awarded to Lieutenant Commander Joseph O'Callahan, *Franklin's* Catholic (Jesuit) chaplain, and one of two chaplains on board. O'Callahan had only been aboard the carrier for 17 days, having previously served as the chaplain on *Ranger* (CV-4) in the Atlantic. He would be the first chaplain in the U.S. Navy to receive the Medal of Honor (the first chaplain in any service since the Civil War and the first Catholic chaplain in any service to be

awarded the Medal of Honor). Callahan was initially below decks and was wounded by secondary explosions after the bombs hit. His award citation follows:

The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Commander (Chaplain) Joseph Timothy O'Callahan, United States Naval Reserve, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as Chaplain aboard the USS FRANKLIN when that vessel was fiercely attacked by enemy Japanese aircraft during offensive operations near Kobe, Japan on 19 March 1945. A valiant and forceful leader, calmly braving the perilous barriers of flame and twisted metal to aid his men and his ship, Lieutenant Commander O'Callahan groped his way through smoke-filled corridors to the open flight deck and into the midst of violently exploding bombs, shells, rockets and other armament. With the ship rocked by incessant explosions, with debris and fragments raining down and fires raging in ever-increasing fury, he ministered to the wounded and dying, comforting and encouraging men of all faiths; he organized and led firefighting crews into the blazing inferno on the flight deck; he directed the jettisoning of live ammunition and the flooding of the magazine; he manned a hose to cool hot, armed bombs rolling dangerously on the listing flight deck, continuing his efforts despite searing suffocating smoke which forced men to fall back gasping and imperiled others who replaced them. Serving with courage, fortitude and deep spiritual strength, Lieutenant Commander Callahan inspired the gallant officers and men of FRANKLIN to fight heroically and with profound faith in the face of almost

certain death and to return their stricken ship to port.

Many survivors of *Franklin* reported being inspired by the white cross on O'Callahan's helmet, which seemed to be everywhere on the ship. Of note, a famous wartime photo shows O'Callahan administering last rites to a wounded Sailor, Robert C. Blanchard. Blanchard actually survived and lived to be 90. Also of note, O'Callahan was initially awarded the Navy Cross, but publically declined to accept it (the only person during the war to do so) in the belief that he was just doing his duty as a chaplain (leading damage control parties and pitching live ammunition over the side?). When President Harry Truman learned of O'Callahan's actions, he personally intervened to have the award upgraded to the Medal of Honor and personally presented it to O'Callahan, whether he wanted it or not. The destroyer escort (later frigate) *O'Callahan* (DE-/FF-1051) was named in his honor and served in commission from 1968 to 1988.

Another Medal of Honor was awarded to Lieutenant (j.g.) Donald Gary, a 30-year, former enlisted veteran. As an officer in the engineering department knew the ship inside and out. Initially trapped below with about 300 other men, he used an oxygen breathing apparatus (OBA) with a very limited supply to find a way out through 600 feet of mangled ducting and uptakes. Having saved himself, he found another OBA and went back three times to lead ever-larger groups of men from below. His Medal of Honor citation follows:

The President of the United States, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Lieutenant, Junior Grade Donald Arthur Gary, United States Navy, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as an Engineering Officer attached to the USS FRANKLIN when that vessel was fiercely

attacked by enemy aircraft during operations against the Japanese home islands near Kobe, Japan, 19 March 1945. Stationed on the third deck when the ship was rocked by a series of violent explosions set off in her own ready bombs, rockets and ammunition by the hostile attack, Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Gary unhesitatingly risked his life to save several hundred men trapped in a messing compartment filled with smoke, and with no apparent egress. As the imperiled men below decks became increasingly panic-stricken under the raging fury of incessant explosions, he confidently assured them he would find a means of effecting their release and groping through the dark, debris-filled corridors, ultimately discovered an escape way. Staunchedly determined, he struggled back to the messing compartment three times despite menacing flames, flooding water, and the ominous threat of additional explosions, on each time calmly leading his men through the blanketing pall of smoke until the last had been saved. Selfless in concern for his ship and his fellows, he constantly rallied others around him, repeatedly organized and led fire parties into the blazing inferno on the flight deck and when firerooms 1 and 2 were found to be inoperable, entered the No. 3 fireroom and directed the raising of steam in one boiler in the face of extreme difficulty and hazard. An inspiring and courageous leader, Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Gary rendered self-sacrificing service under the most perilous conditions and by his heroic initiative and fortitude and valor was responsible for the saving of hundreds of lives. His conduct throughout reflects the highest credit upon himself and upon the U.S. Naval Service.

The 19 Navy Crosses awarded to *Franklin*'s crew included the commanding officer, Captain Leslie

Gehres; the executive officer, Commander Joseph Taylor; and the navigator, Commander Stephen Jurika. A number of accounts credit Jurika with exercising decisive leadership during the initial shock of the explosions and convincing the skipper that the ship could be saved. (Gehres would later come under considerable criticism for his decision to secure from general quarters just before the attack, for failing to sound battle stations at the first warning, and for later wanting to press charges against many of the crew who went over the side, accusing them of "desertion." These accusations resulted in public controversy, and all such charges were later dropped by the Navy. Gehres never received another command, but he did receive a promotion to Rear Admiral. His leadership style has been described as "toxic," which was partially true, but he was also one of the first "mustangs"—former enlisted—who gained a reserve commission during World War I and was the first to command a carrier. As such, he was viewed with suspicion by the Navy hierarchy, almost all of whom were Annapolis graduates.)



Lieutenant Commander Joseph O'Callahan gives last rites to an injured crewman aboard Franklin (CV-13), after the ship was set afire by a Japanese air attack, 19 March 1945. The crewman is reportedly Robert C. Blanchard, who actually survived his injuries (80-G-49132).

After the initial explosions, many of the ship's hospital corpsmen were killed or trapped below, as were all three of the ship's medical officers, one of whom was killed. Only the air group flight

surgeon, Lieutenant Commander Samuel Sherman, was on the flight deck to deal with the carnage there. Sherman created casualty assistance parties on the spot, and was greatly aided by the skipper of VF-5, Lieutenant Commander MacGregor Kilpatrick (himself a veteran of the loss of *Lexington* and *Yorktown*) in ministering to casualties. Many survivors owed their lives to the actions of Sherman and Kilpatrick, and to the massive amounts of medical supplies stowed all over the ship for such an eventuality (everything except blood plasma was pre-positioned in large quantities). Sherman refused orders to leave the ship when the air group personnel were ordered on to the *Santa Fe* despite threats of being charged with disobeying an order. Both Sherman and Kilpatrick were awarded the Navy Cross. Their citations follow:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Lieutenant Commander (MC) Samuel Robert Sherman, United States Naval Reserve, for distinguished service in the line of his profession, extraordinary courage, and disregard for personal danger while serving as Flight Surgeon of the Air Group aboard the Aircraft Carrier USS FRANKLIN (CV-13), which was striking the Japanese home islands in the vicinity of Kobe, Japan on 19 March 1945. Stationed on the flight deck and exposed to innumerable explosions of bombs and rockets as well as continuing enemy air attack, Lieutenant Commander Sherman coolly, courageously and successfully cared for numerous wounded. While still subject to enemy air attack, he set up an emergency sick bay and dressing station where he gave treatment to injured personnel. Later, when the opportunity became available he calmly superintended the transfer of casualties to a ship alongside. Though directed to leave with his Air Group he insisted on remaining aboard the crippled carrier to carry on with

his valiant efforts, which resulted in saving numerous lives. During the following days and while his ship was still being subject to enemy attack he continued to display the same personal courage and professional ability. His conduct throughout was keeping in the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Lieutenant Commander MacGregor Kilpatrick, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism in operations against the enemy while serving as Pilot of a carrier-based Navy Fighter Plane in Fighting Squadron FIVE (VF-5), and as Squadron Officer on board the Aircraft Carrier USS FRANKLIN (CV-13), during a Japanese aerial attack which seriously damaged that vessel as she prepared to strike the Japanese mainland in the vicinity of Kobe, on 19 March 1945. When his ship was damaged by enemy aircraft and suffered subsequent internal explosions of ready bombs, rockets and ammunition, Lieutenant Commander Kilpatrick led parties of men in continuous valiant firefighting, jettisoning shells in enclosed mounts and flooding ready service magazines until forced to leave the ship by a superior officer with his squadron. His gallantry and devotion to duty contributed materially to the saving of the ship and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

By 1000, the smoke and heat in *Franklin's* engineering spaces made them untenable, reaching 200 degrees in some before the gauges cracked. Numerous personnel in the engine rooms and firerooms passed out from heat exhaustion before being ordered out. *Franklin* subsequently went dead in the water, only 50 miles from Japan. By noon, however, the remaining crew had brought most of the fires

under control and had stabilized the list at 13 degrees. The heavy cruiser *Pittsburgh* (CA-72), soon to lose her bow in a typhoon, took *Franklin* in tow. Luckily, the sea was relatively calm, but it was still a difficult maneuver given the wind direction. Combat air patrol from other carriers kept additional Japanese aircraft mostly at bay. However, at 1254 another Judy dive-bomber attacked. An assortment of amateur gunners on *Franklin* brought some of the guns to bear and downed the Judy, but not before it released its bomb, which fortunately missed by 200 yards. (Most of the regular gun crews had been killed, blown overboard, or jumped overboard to escape the inferno on the flight deck.)

Not long after midnight, *Franklin* regained power and was capable of making two knots, and, by the early morning, regained steering control. By 1100, she was capable of making 15 knots. At 1235 on 20 March, *Pittsburgh* dropped the tow and *Franklin* proceeded under her own power to Ulithi Atoll for emergency repairs, and thence to Pearl Harbor and New York City, arriving on 26 April (she went to New York because all the West Coast shipyards were full repairing ships damaged by *kamikaze* attacks). On 24 March, Commander Fifth Fleet, Admiral Raymond Spruance, sent a signal that the "ability, fortitude, and sheer guts of the skipper and crew in saving their ship were in the highest degree praiseworthy." Vice Admiral Aubrey Fitch (who had been in tactical control of the U.S. carriers at the Battle of Coral Sea in May 1942) declared, "only by the outstanding skill, stamina and heroism of the officers and crew" could this have been done; that there was no precedent in the annals of sea warfare for a capital ship returning to port after such severe damage.

Franklin was by far the most heavily damaged carrier in the war to survive (although *Bunker Hill* would suffer almost as badly due to a *kamikaze* hit in May 1945). *Franklin* was in many respects in worse shape than *Lexington* (CV-2) and *Yorktown* (CV-5) when they sank at Coral Sea and Midway

respectively, and suffered far more casualties than either. Unlike the other lost fleet carriers—*Lexington*, *Yorktown*, *Wasp* (CV-7), and *Hornet* (CV-8)—*Franklin* suffered no torpedo hits, which made all the difference in the world (to the extent that there was flooding on *Franklin*, it was mostly self-inflicted—necessarily so—by firefighting water).



USS Franklin (CV-13): Church service on the ship's ruined hangar deck, taken upon her return to the United States from the Pacific for repair of battle damage received off Japan on 19 March 1945. Location is probably in, or near, New York Harbor, circa 28 April 1945 (80-G-K-5056).

The casualty count for *Franklin* varies from source to source, some of which don't include air group personnel or don't include Marines, or passengers who were in transit, or a journalist, or don't account for those who died from their wounds much later. In his *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Samuel Eliot Morison gives figures of 724 killed or missing and 265 wounded. Some sources who were aboard *Franklin* give figures between 824 and 832 for those who were lost or buried at sea. Given the sheer carnage, it's also possible that different unrecognizable parts of the same body received separate burials. Ultimately, the Navy awarded 808 posthumous Purple Hearts and an additional 347 Purple Hearts to survivors. More recent research gives a number of 807 killed and 487 wounded. If the deaths on 19 March are combined with those of 30 October 1944, then *Franklin* lost upward of 924 crewmen, the highest of any U.S. ship in World War II except the

battleship *Arizona* at Pearl Harbor. "Lucky 13" she was not.

Among the dead on *Franklin* was a passenger, Captain Arnold J. Isbell, who was on his way to take command of *Yorktown* (CV-10) following his highly successful tour as commander of the USS *Card* (CVE-11) hunter-killer task group in the Atlantic. He had been awarded a Distinguished Service Medal and the task group a Presidential Unit Citation for sinking eight German U-boats. The destroyer *Arnold J. Isbell* (DD-869) was named in his honor and served in commission from 1946 to 1974. Also among the dead was one of the ship's doctors, Lieutenant Commander George W. Fox, who was killed by smoke inhalation while tending mass casualties; he would be awarded a posthumous Navy Cross. Since no ship was ever named in his honor, I've included his award citation:

The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the Navy Cross (Posthumously) to Lieutenant Commander (MC) George William Fox, for distinguished service in the line of his profession, extraordinary courage and disregard of personal danger while serving as a Medical Officer aboard the Aircraft Carrier USS FRANKLIN (CV-13) following an attack by enemy aircraft while striking the Japanese home islands in the vicinity of Kobe, Japan on 19 March 1945. When his ship was turned into an inferno by an enemy air attack which started violent explosions and raging fires on board, Lieutenant Commander Fox unhesitatingly remained at his battle station in the below decks sick bay and despite the penetration of terrific blasts and fumes, steadfastly continued to protect his patients and minister to casualties until he himself succumbed to the dense suffocating smoke. Lieutenant Commander Fox's valiant and self-sacrificing efforts on behalf of others, his superb courage and unfaltering devotion to duty in the face of grave peril were in

keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Navy. He gallantly gave his life for his country. [Note, in a posthumous award, the President takes "pride" not "pleasure."]

Essex-class carriers like *Franklin*, although built during the war, were actually designed before the outbreak of war. Therefore, the design was based on a best pre-war estimate of wartime requirements rather than lessons learned as a result of the war. Nevertheless, much was learned from the loss of fleet carriers early in the war, which resulted in improved firefighting techniques and equipment that helped carriers late in the war survive damage that earlier would have resulted in their loss. One big improvement was the realization that the entire crew needed to be trained in firefighting, not just specialized damage control teams. (This hard-won lesson was lost after the war and had to be re-learned the hard way during the *Oriskany* [CVA-34] and *Forrestal* [CVA-59] fires off Vietnam in 1966 and 1967.)

As an example, a Naval Reserve officer, Lieutenant Harold J. Burke, who was also the deputy chief of the New York City Fire Department, succeeded in convincing Rear Admiral Edward L. Cochrane, chief of the Bureau of Ships, of the value of the new fog nozzle, which was demonstrated to fight fire better than a solid stream. Burke and Lieutenant Thomas A. Kilduff, USNR, of the Boston Fire Department, subsequently trained over 260 officer instructors and established schools with mock-up ships at every naval base in the United States and on several islands in the Pacific. These trained Sailors in realistic damage control and firefighting. Their operative philosophy was to "get the fear of fire out of the sailor," by demonstrating that if properly equipped with fire mask and helmet, all-purpose nozzle and applicator, firefighting teams could advance to the source, extinguish the blaze, and live to tell about it.

Based on wartime experience, additional equipment was added to ships. For example, the *Essex*-class carriers were designed with 14 fire mains to provide redundancy. However, all were dependent on ship's power. Based on wartime experience, two more fire mains were added operated by individual gasoline engines. One such fire main on *Franklin* generated fog spray for eight hours when all the others were incapacitated by power failure. As a result of early-war experience, all ships were equipped with 160-pound handy-billies, and destroyers and larger warships were equipped with added 500-pound mobile pumps, each operated by its own gasoline engine. Other changes quickly incorporated into new ships were hoses and couplings that were made standard throughout the entire Navy (which hadn't been the case before the war). Other equipment was added, such as portable oxyacetylene steel-cutting devices, along with the development and wider use of rescue breathing apparatus. Aircraft carriers had a Foamite system installed for every hundred feet of flight deck. Salvage vessels (ARS) were equipped to fight fires in addition to towing capability. It was rapidly implemented innovations such as these, along with extensive training, that enabled U.S. ships toward the end of the war to survive far greater damage than ships sunk earlier in the conflict.

Franklin was rapidly repaired, but never returned to active service. Of 24 *Essex*-class carriers built during the war (or completed just afterward), only *Franklin* and *Bunker Hill* never saw further service. *Franklin* was decommissioned in 1947, stricken from the Naval Vessel Register in 1959, and was unceremoniously scrapped in 1966.

Sources include: *NHHC Dictionary of American Fighting Ships* (DANFS), *USS Franklin* (CV-13); "USS FRANKLIN CV-13 War Damage Report No. 56"; Oral Histories—Attacks on Japan 1945, B "USS *Franklin*: Struck by a Japanese Dive Bomber during World War II," historynet.com, by David H. Lippman from *World War II Magazine* (March

1995); *History of United States Naval Operations in World War Two, Vol. XIV: Victory in the Pacific*, by Samuel Eliot Morison (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1960).

H-043-2: "Sojourn Through Hell"—Vietnamization and U.S. Navy Prisoners of War, 1969–70

H-Gram 043, [Attachment 2](#)

Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC

March 2020

The Nixon administration's "Vietnamization" policy gained a full head of steam in late 1969 and throughout 1970, with the intent to turn as much of the fighting as possible over to Republic of Vietnam forces and withdraw as many U.S. forces as quickly as possible. Not surprisingly, the North Vietnamese Communists were all for this course of action. The U.S. naval component of this process was termed "ACTOV" ("accelerated turnover to the Vietnamese") involving the "incremental" turnover of the river and coastal combat craft and logistics support network ("precipitous" may actually be a more accurate term). Nevertheless, the approximately 560 officers and men of the Naval Advisory Group did extraordinary work in training and integrating Vietnamese navy personnel into operations in ever-increasing numbers such that by late 1970, entire commands had transitioned to South Vietnamese control.

The Nixon administration and senior U.S. military and naval leaders in Vietnam at the time (including the Commander Naval Forces Vietnam, Vice Admiral Elmo Zumwalt) were not naïve about North Vietnamese intentions. In the spring of 1970, in order to knock the Communists off-balance and protect the Vietnamization effort, the South Vietnamese, with significant U.S. support, launched a series of attacks into Cambodia against Communist staging areas, supply dumps, and the logistics support network that had largely operated for years with impunity due to



Command emblem used by the U.S. Naval Advisory Group during the Vietnam War. It features a pair of crossed anchors and rice heads superimposed over a Vietnamese flag (NH 74600-KN).

Cambodia's supposed neutrality. (The Cambodian government, under Prince Sihanouk, made no serious attempt to prevent the North Vietnamese from using Cambodian territory to run supplies to Communist forces in South Vietnam, at least until March 1970, when Sihanouk was essentially overthrown by a military coup led by anti-Communist General Lon Nol.)

From a military perspective, the U.S. and South Vietnamese incursions into Cambodia that occurred between May and July of 1970 were a qualified success, although that was partly due to the fact that the North Vietnamese learned they were coming and adopted a strategy of withdrawing to remain just out of reach. The operations did capture massive amounts of arms and ammunition. From a U.S. domestic political perspective, the Cambodian incursions resulted in major backlash. Although 50 percent of the U.S. population supported Nixon's strategy, vociferous

opponents accused the Nixon administration of lying to the American people by “widening” the war in Vietnam rather than withdrawing. This led to significant protests, including the killing of four Kent State students (two of whom weren’t even protesters) by the Ohio National Guard, which was, in turn, followed by the bombings and burnings of about 30 Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) buildings on campuses across the country.

Despite the domestic upheaval in the United States, the U.S. Navy kept doing what the U.S. government asked it to do as best it could within ever-increasing political constraints. On 9 May 1970, a combined Vietnamese-American naval task force headed up the Mekong River and into Cambodia. The U.S. contingent included a variety of riverine patrol craft, supported by Helicopter Attack Light Squadron THREE (HAL-3) attack helicopters and Light Attack Squadron FOUR (VAL-4) aircraft, in addition to ten strike assault boats of Strike Assault Boat Squadron TWENTY, a new fast-reaction unit established by Zumwalt. U.S. Naval Advisory Group personnel were embarked on each South Vietnamese vessel. Although, for political reasons, U.S. Navy personnel were not allowed to go past the halfway point to the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh, the Vietnamese Navy boats were all the way to the capital by the end of the first day, and exhibited generally good performance throughout, suggestive of effective U.S. training. The U.S. Navy boats pulled out of Cambodia by late June, but the South Vietnamese continued to exercise effective control of the waterway while evacuating over 80,000 ethnic Vietnamese from Cambodia who had been caught in the ground fighting.

In support of the Cambodian incursion, the U.S. Seventh Fleet beefed up the carrier presence in the South China Sea to three carriers at a time. Carriers that operated in the area during the spring and summer of 1970 included *Coral Sea* (CVA-43), *Ranger* (CVA-61), *Shangri-La* (CVS-

38), *Bon Homme Richard* (CVA-31), *America* (CVA-66), and *Oriskany* (CVA-34). Task Force 77 carrier aircraft increased the level of effort against North Vietnamese supply lines through Laos, allowing U.S. Air Force aircraft based in Thailand and South Vietnam to focus on Cambodia.

Since the Johnson administration had halted the bombing of North Vietnam in 1968, the primary target set for U.S. carrier aircraft were trucks, vehicles, troops, and chokepoints along the “Ho Chi Minh Trail” through Laos. U.S. operations over Laos (which, like Cambodia, was supposedly neutral, but made no attempt to keep the North Vietnamese from using their territory) included “Commando Bolt” operations, which involved the use of new EA-6B electronic countermeasures carrier jets, sophisticated air and ground sensor systems, and increasing use of precision-guided bombs to enhance the effectiveness of strikes against the North Vietnamese supply lines. U.S. Navy jets also continued to fly reconnaissance missions over southern North Vietnam, and every once in a while a “tit-for-tat” strike would be ordered against a North Vietnamese target whenever the North Vietnamese fired on one of the U.S. reconnaissance jets.

During this period, Communist activity in the coastal regions of South Vietnam was at a low ebb (the Viet Cong had still not recovered from their devastating losses resulting from the premature Tet Offensive in early 1968). As a result, the U.S. Navy gunfire support presence was drawn down, including the departure of the reactivated battleship *New Jersey* (BB-62). *New Jersey* had been reactivated during the Korean War, returned to “mothballs,” and reactivated again in 1968 for the Vietnam War. During her deployment to Vietnam between September 1968 and April 1969, she fired 5,688 rounds of 16-inch and 14,891 rounds of 5-inch shells at enemy positions in both North and South Vietnam. Despite the success of her deployment, *New Jersey* was ordered deactivated upon her return to port by the Secretary of Defense as a cost-saving move.



Secretary of the Navy John H. Chafee (center right) inspects one of over 3,000 captured North Vietnamese bicycles used to transport munitions at headquarters of the 1st Cavalry Division in Vietnam. The bicycles were part of the equipment captured during the June 1970 operations in Cambodia (USN 1144256).

Meanwhile, though, U.S. and allied forces (including Australia) continued to have significant success in ongoing Operation Market Time, interdicting North Vietnamese attempts to get supplies to Viet Cong forces in South Vietnam via the sea. The North Vietnamese had been sending ships far along the outer reaches of the South China Sea and bringing in supplies via the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville, but the incursion into Cambodia finally put a stop to that. The North Vietnamese also attempted 15 supply missions via trawler into South Vietnam between August 1969 and the end of 1970. Only one made it, and one was destroyed by allied forces. The other 13 turned back after they realized they had been detected and were being tracked. Throughout all of this, American prisoners of war in North Vietnam, mostly downed U.S. Navy and Air Force aviators and a few Marines, had suffered

brutal treatment at the hands of their captors going back to 1964. This treatment included frequent interrogations accompanied by torture, as well as brutal beatings and grossly inadequate diet and medical care. One POW would later describe it as a "sojourn through hell." Only in late 1969 did the barbaric treatment of U.S. POWs ease up somewhat, although it was still a far cry from what the Geneva Conventions called for. This change was due to a number of reasons, but a significant factor were the actions of the senior Navy POW, Captain James Bond Stockdale, and the most junior Navy POW, Seaman Apprentice Douglas B. Hegdahl III.

On 5 August 1969, the North Vietnamese made a big mistake when they released Seaman Doug Hegdahl as a propaganda ploy, which backfired. Known as "The Incredibly Stupid One" by his captors, Hegdahl had been blown overboard by a gun blast on his ship, the cruiser *Canberra* (CAG-2), off the coast of Vietnam on 6 April 1967, subsequently fell into the hands of the North Vietnamese, and wound up in the "Hanoi Hilton." As the junior-most captive, Hegdahl played dumb to the hilt, even claiming that he could not read or write, and the Vietnamese assigned him to do menial tasks around his camp, which actually gave him much greater access to other prisoners (and opportunities to sabotage five trucks). What the North Vietnamese did not know was that during his year and a half of captivity, Hegdahl memorized the names, capture date, method of capture, and personal information of about 256 other POWs (to the tune of "Old MacDonald Had a Farm"). Hegdahl was ordered by his superior officers to accept the early release (despite the POWs' prohibition against doing so) in order to bring back this vital information to U.S. military authorities, as well as provide eye-witness confirmation that the North Vietnamese had engaged in torture of prisoners.

Up to this point in the war, the United States did not know specific information about which aviators had been captured, killed while being

shot down, died in captivity, or were missing in action and unaccounted for. The fact that the North Vietnamese were torturing prisoners was first confirmed when POW Commander Jeremiah Denton famously blinked his eyes in Morse code to signal "T-O-R-T-U-R-E" when forced to participate in a propaganda broadcast in 1966 (for which he would receive extra torture and a Navy Cross). Hegdahl provided additional confirmation in far greater detail. After his release from captivity, Hegdahl was ordered to Paris to assist the U.S. delegation at the interminable "peace talks" in confronting the North Vietnamese with evidence of their flagrant violation of the Geneva Accords.

Another reason that the North Vietnamese relented somewhat in their abuse of prisoners was due to the ongoing wall of resistance put up by virtually all the U.S. POWs by refusing to participate in North Vietnamese propaganda activities. The Vietnamese began to realize that torture was not having the desired effect. This, and the resistance of the POWs to interrogation and torture, was in significant measure due to the senior U.S. Navy officer in captivity, Captain James B. Stockdale, who had been shot down over North Vietnam and captured in September 1965. Stockdale was specifically instrumental in establishing and enforcing a POW code of conduct tailored for the situation within North Vietnamese prison camps, and it was adherence to this code that enabled many of the POWs to endure the horrific treatment and still survive, and for almost all to return with honor at the end.

Stockdale would be present at both the beginning and the end of significant U.S. Navy involvement in the Vietnam War. He would earn his first Distinguished Flying Cross as skipper of VF-51, embarked on *Ticonderoga* (CVA-14) during the first (real) Gulf of Tonkin incident on 2 August 1964. He flew one of the four F-8 Crusaders that attacked North Vietnamese P-4 torpedo boats attempting to attack the U.S. destroyer *Maddox* (DD-731), while *Maddox* was conducting a

"DeSoto" mission (signals intelligence collection) off North Vietnam. On 4 August, he also flew in support of *Maddox* and destroyer *Turner Joy* (DD-951) when they were engaged in firing on what (after the war) were determined to be phantom radar targets during the second Gulf of Tonkin incident. In response to the second attack, Stockdale then flew on the retaliatory strike on North Vietnamese targets on 5 August on the order of President Lyndon Johnson. During this mission, Lieutenant (j.g.) Everett Alvarez, Jr.'s A-4 Skyhawk was shot down and he became the first U.S. pilot captured by the North Vietnamese, and the second longest U.S. POW to be held in captivity (over eight years).

Stockdale returned for another Vietnam combat deployment as the Commander Carrier Air Group TWELVE embarked in carrier *Oriskany*, during which he would earn a second Distinguished Flying Cross before his A-4 Skyhawk was hit and disabled by North Vietnamese ground fire and he was forced to eject. As the senior U.S. naval officer, Stockdale was singled out for exceptionally severe treatment in order to break his will, especially after the North Vietnamese figured out he was the leading figure in the "resistance." Stockdale was one of a group of 11 POWs (known as the "Alcatraz Gang," which also included Commander Denton) who the North Vietnamese determined to be particularly incorrigible and uncooperative, subjecting them to long periods of solitary confinement interspersed with brutal torture.

Stockdale would, of course, receive no medals until after his release in 1973, but during the course of his seven and a half years in captivity, he would be awarded two Distinguished Service Medals for his role as senior U.S. Navy officer, along with four Silver Stars and two Bronze Stars with Combat V for his resistance to multiple incidents of severe torture. He would also earn a Legion of Merit with Combat V and the Prisoner of War Medal for his time in captivity.

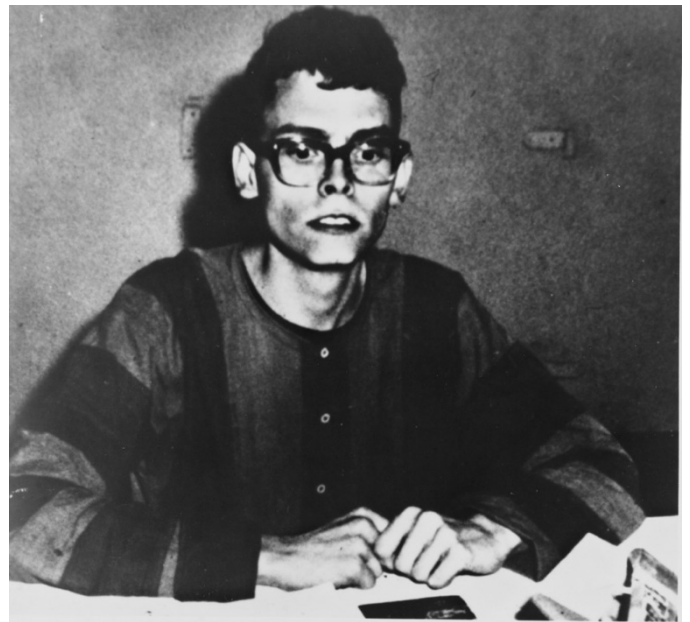
On 4 March 1976, Stockdale would be presented with the Medal of Honor for his actions on 4 September 1969 as set forth in the citation:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty on 4 September 1969 while senior officer in the Prisoner of War camps of North Vietnam. Recognized by his captors as the leader of the Prisoners of War resistance to interrogation and in their refusal to participate in propaganda exploitation, Rear Admiral (then Captain) Stockdale was singled out for interrogation and attendant torture after he was detected in a covert communications attempt. Sensing the start of another purge, and aware that his earlier attempts as self-disfiguration to dissuade his captors from using him for propaganda purposes had resulted in cruel and agonizing punishment, Rear Admiral Stockdale resolved to make himself a symbol of resistance regardless of personal sacrifice. He deliberately inflicted a near mortal wound to his person in order to convince his captors of his willingness to give up his life rather than capitulate. He was subsequently discovered and revived by the North Vietnamese who, convinced of his indomitable spirit, abated in their employment of excessive harassment and torture toward all of the Prisoners of War. By his heroic action, at great peril to himself, he earned the everlasting gratitude of his fellow prisoners and of his country. Rear Admiral Stockdale's valiant leadership and extraordinary courage in a hostile environment sustained and enhanced the finest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

By the end of 1970, most U.S. Navy activity in Vietnam had greatly wound down (until the North Vietnamese "Easter Offensive" in 1972). Although the worst of the torture abated, for the U.S. POWs

in North Vietnam the psychological torment continued with no end in sight, as the enemy appeared determined to use the POWs as bargaining chips in negotiations until the bitter end. However, thanks to the guile of Doug Hegdahl and the extreme heroism of Stockdale and other U.S. POWs in refusing to give in to North Vietnamese torture, the treatment of the POWs between late 1969 and their release in 1973 was slightly less uncivilized.

Sources include: *The Battle Behind Bars: Navy and Marine POWs in the Vietnam War*, by Stuart I. Rochester (Washington, DC: NHHHC/Naval Historical Foundation, 2010), and *By Sea, Air and Land: An Illustrated History of the U.S. Navy and the War in Southeast Asia*, by Edward J. Marolda (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, 1994).



Seaman Douglas B. Hegdahl appears gaunt and emaciated before his release from North Vietnam after two and a half years of captivity. His weight loss was about 60 pounds. The young sailor accidentally fell overboard while his ship was in the Gulf of Tonkin in April 1967. He was picked up by North Vietnamese fishermen, who turned him over to the military. Hegdahl and two other Americans were freed by the North Vietnamese on 5 August 1969 (70-2654).